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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the present system of teacher certification in New York State fails to adequately identify criteria for competency and suggests ways to improve this situation. The writer states that too much emphasis has been placed on the means by which certification is achieved while too little emphasis has been placed on the goal of certification. To correct this overemphasis it is proposed that a competency-based and field-centered program be established which explicitly and publicly states the required competencies, provides for their assessment, establishes performance standards, and allows for their modification. Three major changes in certification policy and procedure are recommended: (1) the Division of Teacher Education and Certification will cease evaluating individual credentials; this task should be performed by each preparatory program; (2) within five years a teacher with a provisional certificate should complete a masters degree or 30 semester hours of graduate study; and (3) periodic assessment should be made of newly certified teachers. The author also argues that continuing education programs for teachers need to be improved. (Author/DI)

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NEW YORK STATE AND CERTIFICATION BY COMPETENCY

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CS 200 414

McKnight (13)

The news media during the past few months has been filled with reports about Henry Kissinger's worldwide travels. As you stop to think about the way in which the news has been presented it becomes quite clear that the important and most newsworthy elements centered around "destination and purpose" - the focal points were couched in terms such as: "has gone to _____" "is expected to arrive at" "will confer about" "has been discussing _____".

The fact that Henry flew, walked, or drove was of interest, but only that. The critical elements were his purpose and destination.

The emphasis which the news media has put on purpose and destination in relation to Dr. Kissinger's travels tells us something about what a State certification system should emphasize.

I say that because as I look at the development of New York's certification system, I see that we have, for more than a quarter of a century, emphasized not the purpose or the destination, but the travel arrangements - what means of travel are to be used and what route will be taken. To illustrate what I mean let me use the example of an English teacher. (I guess for obvious reasons.) Our identifying landmarks by which we know we've reached our destination is the issuance of a certificate to teach English. The system does not provide for any other identifying factors. What we have placed our emphasis on is the route to be taken, namely 36 semester hours of content, 12 semester hours of professional study, and a field experience. Without a clear definition of destination we have locked in and rigidified the factors which should be flexible and responsive

a wide variety of variables.

Before going any further I want to set the stage so that you understand my bias. You know I work for a State Education Department. Thus I represent a complex organizational structure, which is responsible to the citizens of the State of New York. The actions of the State Education Department, in the area of teacher education and certification, are to be directed towards providing the best possible assurance that competent people are staffing the schools. My concern centers on the system which my State uses to provide that assurance. My remarks in no way are meant to indicate that the 200,000 plus staff members in New York are incompetent. Instead, they are aimed at suggesting that the present system is unable to identify competency and to sketch the ways the State will seek to change the situation.

The certification system presently in effect in New York is familiar to all of you, for every State uses essentially the same system, and it was appropriate for its day. But the evolutionary process continues to operate and major changes in the systems are beginning to appear nationwide.

For years in New York competency has been described as the appropriate mixture of courses and/or credits, and in addition, the appropriate mix has been mandated by the State. To me, it means that we have been placing our hopes and aspirations on the means and routes of travel and not on the destination. Yet the vital element is not how we travel, but whether the destination is reached.

It is toward the objective of assuring that the destination has been reached that the State system must move.

At the last count, 30 of the 50 states were in various stages of grappling with the problem and 15 of the 30 were actively in an operating stage of some sort. There are a variety of approaches being used by the states and I'd like to spend the next few minutes describing the approach that New York is taking.

The history of certification in New York documents quite clearly that the purpose of certification of public school staff members is to ensure competence, but I cannot find a clear, public statement of policy to that effect prior to October 27, 1972, less than a month ago.

The Board of Regents, which is the governing body for all educational endeavors in New York, has approved the following statement of policy.

"The Regents goal for the preparation and practice of professional personnel in the schools is:

> To establish a system of certification by which the State can assure the public that professional personnel in the schools possess and maintain demonstrated competence to enable children to learn."

Let me add here that this is not an immediately attainable goal. It represents the destination. The essence of our mode of reaching the destination is that the system will be one that is competency-based and field-centered.

The movement in this direction will cover three specific thrusts: first, the accreditation of preparatory programs; second, certification practice and policy; and third, the development of a system of continued education. A tentative timetable has been developed, but progress will dictate the actual timetable.

The first activity is to occur in the area of the accreditation of preparatory programs. In New York no college or university may offer a program of preparation without official Department sanction. This is true for all programs, not just preparatory programs leading to certification.

Our Division has the responsibility of accrediting all programs leading to certification. We have used the traditional accreditation procedures of gathering data on factors such as: the training and experience of faculty, the specific components of the curriculum, the physical facilities, the supporting resources, and the admission and grading practices. As we analyze those procedures two important facts stand out like heavily bandaged thumbs. First, the data on which decisions are made are related only to the complex mixture of variables which aided a person to reach the destination. Second, the destination was described as achieving the certificate. Yet the certification requirements are based on curriculum elements. A vicious cycle.

The Department must assume part of the blame for the second item. The Department's power is awesome and I'm afraid we have been guilty of nit-picking so that freedom of movement has, in some instances, been perceived as impossible.

We hope to overcome the problems and to encourage the most open system possible. To do that we are saying that any new program or any program due for re-accreditation after September 1, 1973 will not be approved unless it is "competency-based and field-centered."

A competency-based and field-centered program is to have the following characteristics.

1. It will be based on explicit and publicly stated competencies. Those skills, knowledge, and attitudes which graduates will be required to demonstrate.
2. It will have assessment procedures which have explicit and publicly stated conditions of performance and levels of mastery.
3. It will be able to provide evidence that program graduates have attained the required competencies.
4. It will have not only performance standards for the various program components, but will also have a standard for the program as a whole.
5. It will have a strong research and corrective action plan to enable the appropriateness of competencies to be validated and also to enable modification of competencies or assessment procedures to take place where necessary.

Not necessarily one of the characteristics of a competency-based and field-centered system, but vital to the success of any program is that we will ask for significant and intimate involvement of representation from the schools and the schools' professional

staff in collaboration with the higher institution in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of the program.

There are some other characteristics which relate to the travel arrangements, but the five mentioned above which relate to the destination and evidence that the destination has been reached are the most important ones.

Some of the basic questions that need to be asked are very difficult, for example:

1. What in priority order on the basis of importance are the roles and responsibilities of the person serving in the certification area?
2. What and how many of those roles and responsibilities can a preparatory program deal with and/or be accountable for?
3. What are the component competencies of those roles and responsibilities?
4. How will we know that those competencies have been attained and are appropriate?
5. How will we know that the roles and responsibilities can be met?

In essence the questions deal with the issue of what can be expected in terms of a program candidate's knowledge, his or her capability to enable learning to occur, and his or her sensitivity to children's needs and learning styles.

To many it sounds as if we are expecting perfection by September 2, 1973. Actually, we will be looking for programs to be developed to the best of the developers' ability, for that will establish a point from which growth and maturation can take place.

While objectivity of assessment is most important, it must be realized that total objectivity is impossible to achieve, at least for the present. I personally have no real quarrel with subjective assessment as long as two conditions are met. First, that the assessment criteria are as explicit as possible and public. Secondly, that the assessment is made by more than one person.

I'd like to make one other point before leaving this particular activity. We are not considering limiting the concept of a competency based system to just the professional education sequence. It should pervade the entire program; general education, subject matter specialization, as well as the professional study.

Our timetable indicates that all preparatory programs will be competency-based and field-centered by the end of 1980. This may be an optimistic hope as there presently are 1,961 programs housed in about 110 institutions in the State. I hope it is not overly optimistic.

Whenver all programs are competency-based and field-centered, three major changes in certification policy and procedure are anticipated.

First, the Division of Teacher Education and Certification will cease to do evaluations of individual credentials. At the moment

we do more than 110,000 evaluations each year. However, there is no way that we can continue to do individual evaluations and be true to the concept of competency. Each preparatory program should have the capability of putting individuals, seeking certification, through an assessment procedure and either recommend the candidate for certification or prescribe for him or her.

Second, New York State has had a fifth year requirement for permanent certification for many years. Basically, within five years, the holder of a provisional certificate must either complete an approved masters degree or 30 semester hours of graduate study. Upon completion, a permanent certificate good for the life of the holder, is issued.

To get back to the Plan. We are proposing that the regulations governing the issuance of permanent certificates be repealed, thus leaving only a single certificate in New York.

Third, in place of the permanent certificate and its requirements, we are proposing that a periodic assessment system be instituted for newly certified personnel. I cannot describe the periodic assessment system as it has yet to be designed. Its design will entail a great deal of study and involvement. There are several models which could be followed. For example, here in our host State of Minnesota there is, in essence, a periodic assessment system. Its base is local committee determination under State guidelines. Arizona is moving in a similar direction.

While I cannot describe the exact system since it is yet to be developed, I do know that it must meet the three very basic and essential criteria:

1. It must be what I call a "positive system". A system that is designed to aid persons to maintain and in fact enhance their capabilities. It must not be a system which, in a single blow, determines the existence or non-existence of a staff member's livelihood.
2. It must be linked to the individual's own immediate job responsibility. Periodic assessment based on Statewide normative criteria is not the appropriate method.
3. The system must operate on the basis of explicit and public criteria for both competencies and assessment.

The third major catagory of activity is in the area of continued education. We believe that a more solid commitment must be made to providing appropriate opportunities for continued education for professional staff. To accomplish this we are working in two ways. First, we intend to test the feasibility of covering the State with a series of regional management units called Career Development Centers. These units are not new institutions, but are seen as a means by which the resources of a region can be cataloged and marshalled to meet the expressed needs of school staffs. The governance of these centers are also envisioned as being collaborative approaches and would include at least the representation from higher institutions, area schools, and the staffs of area schools. The centers must, if they are to be effective,

be totally responsive to school needs.

The second effort is to begin to collect the data necessary which would convince the State's Executive Office and Legislature of the need for positive legislative action to assign funds for staff development.

In this catagory we hope to have legislation enacted by 1977 and the Career Development Centers operational by 1980.

To write about the needed action and to talk about it is an easy task. However, no one can either downgrade or deny the difficulties and problems that are ahead of us. The problems of time, involvement, financial needs, and the development of explicit competencies and assessment capabilities are all big ones.

On the other hand, the person preparing to serve in the public schools and the citizens of New York are both entitled to every possible assurance that persons being certified have demonstrated competence in their area of certification.